

RE: DEFINITION OF THE TERRITORIAL JURISDICTIONS OF FAMILY COURTS FOR REGIONS IX AND XI

A.M. No. 20-12-170-RTC, May 20, 2025

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WHEREAS, under Section 12, Article II of the 1987 Constitution, the State "recognizes the sanctity of family life" and binds itself to "protect and strengthen the family as a basic autonomous social institution." Further, under Section 1, Article XV thereof, the State "recognizes the Filipino family as the foundation of the nation" and accordingly "shall strengthen its solidarity and actively promote its total development." And, in Section 3(4), Article XV, the State shall defend "the right of families or family associations to participate in the planning and implementation of policies and programs that affect them;"

WHEREAS, under Section 12, Article VIII of the 1987 Constitution, the manner by which the jurisdiction of various courts shall be exercised is governed by the rules concerning pleading, practice, and procedure in all courts promulgated by the Supreme Court of the Philippines by virtue of Section 5(5), Article VIII of the 1987 Constitution.

WHEREAS, under Section 18 of Batas Pambansa Blg. 129, otherwise known as the "The Judiciary Reorganization Act of 1980", the Supreme Court of the Philippines is authorized to define the territory over which a branch of the Regional Trial Court shall exercise its authority. The territory thus defined shall be deemed to be the territorial area of the branch concerned for purposes of determining the venue of all suits, proceedings, or actions, whether civil or criminal, as well as determining the Metropolitan Trial Courts, Municipal Trial Courts, and Municipal Circuit Trial Courts over which the said branch may exercise appellate jurisdiction.

WHEREAS, under Section 23 of Batas Pambansa Blg. 129, the Supreme Court of the Philippines, in the interest of speedy and efficient administration of justice, is further authorized to designate certain branches of Regional Trial Courts to exclusively handle criminal cases, juvenile and domestic relations cases, agrarian cases, and urban land reform cases which do not fall under the jurisdiction of quasi-judicial bodies and agencies, and/or such other special cases determined by it.

WHEREAS, on October 28, 1997, Republic Act No. 8369, otherwise known as "Family Courts Act of 1997," was enacted in keeping with the mandates of the Constitution and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) which the Philippines ratified on August 21, 1990. The Family Courts Act of 1997 mandates the courts to "preserve the solidarity of the family, provide procedures for the reconciliation of spouses and the amicable settlement of family controversy"[1] and thus required that a Family Court be established in every province and city in the country. In cases where the city is the capital of the province, the Family Court shall be established in the municipality with the highest population.[2]

WHEREAS, the Court En Banc, by Resolution[3] dated January 26, 2021, defined the territorial jurisdictions of Branch 4-Family Court, Dapitan City (Region IX) and Branch 7-Family Court, Sta. Cruz, Davao del Sur (Region XI), viz.:

A.M. No. 20-12-170-RTC (Re: Definition of the Territorial Jurisdictions of Family Courts for Regions IX and

XI).— The Court Resolved, upon the recommendation of the Office of the Court Administrator, to APPROVE the delineation of the respective territorial jurisdictions of the following Family Courts for Regions IX and XI, to wit:

(i) Branch 4-FC (IX), Dapitan City, Zamboanga del Norte, with seat at Dapitan City—over Dapitan City and the Municipalities of Sibutad, Rizal[,] and La Libertad, all in the Province of Zamboanga del Norte; and

(ii) Branch 7-FC (XI), Sta. Cruz, Davao del Sur, with seat at Sta. Cruz—over the Municipality of Sta. Cruz, Davao del Sur[.]

The above Family Courts shall have exclusive authority to handle child and family cases originating from their respective jurisdictions. (Emphasis in the original)

WHEREAS, by Letter[4] dated November 4, 2024 filed before the Office of the Court Administrator (OCA), Hon. Nestor R. Angeles (Judge Angeles), Presiding Judge of Branch 3-Family Court, Regional Trial Court, Dipolog City, sought the re-evaluation of the current jurisdictional assignments of Branch 3-Family Court of Dipolog City and Branch 4-Family Court of Dapitan City, both of which are under the 9th Judicial Region, Regional Trial Court, Dipolog City (subject Family Courts). Judge Angeles emphasized the existence of a significant disparity in the number of cases assigned between the subject family courts and the resulting imbalance which could potentially affect the performance and quality of service rendered by each family court.[5]

WHEREAS, by Memorandum[6] dated February 10, 2025, Hon. Raul B. Villanueva, Court Administrator, acknowledged the glaring caseload disparity between the subject Family Courts. As culled from the records of the Court Management Office-OCA, the latest data on the case flow and pending cases of these two family courts are as follows:

2024

Period Beginning

Case Inflow

Case Outflow

Pending Cases

Branch 3-Family Court Dipolog City

September

296

36

5

327

October

327

39

39

327

November

327

13

19

321

December

321

9

20

310

Branch 4-Family Court Dapitan City

September

85

11

4

92

October

92

14

8

98

November

98

12

3

107

December

107

5

1

111

Based on these data, OCA submitted the following recommendations, viz.:

PREMISES CONSIDERED, it is respectfully recommended for the consideration of the Honorable Court that:

1. the territorial jurisdiction of Branch 4-FC, Dapitan City, Zamboanga del Norte, be AMENDED such that the Municipalities of Mutia, Piñan, and Polanco, all in the Province of Zamboanga del Norte, be TRANSFERRED to its territorial jurisdiction to read as follows:

"(i) Branch 4-FC (IX), Dapitan City, Zamboanga del Norte, with seal at Dapitan City—over Dapitan City and the Municipalities of Sibutad, Rizal, La Libertad, Mutia, Piñan, and Polanco, all in the Province of Zamboanga del Norte";

2. henceforth, all incoming cases falling within the exclusive original jurisdiction of Family Courts ([f]amily cases) originating from Dapitan City and the Municipalities of Sibutad, Rizal, La Libertad, Mutia, Piñan, and Polanco, all in the Province of Zamboanga del Norte, be FILED in Branch 4-FC, Dapitan City, Zamboanga del Norte;

3. all [f]amily cases comprising of pending civil cases which have not yet reached the pre-trial stage, and criminal cases where the accused have not yet been arraigned, as of the date of the effectivity of this amendment[,] originating from the Municipalities of Mutia, Piñan, and Polanco, all in the Province of Zamboanga del Norte, be TRANSFERRED [to] Branch 4-FC, Dapitan City, Zamboanga del Norte;

4. all family cases comprising of pending civil cases which have already reached the pre-trial stage, and criminal cases where the accused have already been arraigned, as of the date of the effectivity of this amendment[,] originating from the Municipalities of Mutia, Piñan, and Polanco, all in the Province of Zamboanga del Norte, be RETAINED in Branch 3-FC, Dipolog City, Zamboanga del Norte;

5. archived family cases originating from the Municipalities of Mutia, Piñan, and Polanco, all in the Province of Zamboanga del Norte, be RETAINED in Branch 3-FC, Dipolog City, Zamboanga del Norte[,] to be heard and tried thereat once revived; and

6. all court records be AMENDED to conform with this development.[7] (Emphasis in the original)

WHEREAS, the Court recognizes the mandate of the Committee on Family Courts and Juvenile Concerns (CFCJC) to, inter alia, monitor the implementation of the plan for the creation and organization of Family Courts including identification of procedural rules and court guidelines, as well as judicial and legal forms, that must be adopted to increase the effectiveness of Family Courts.[8] Pursuant thereto, the Court has directed the CFCJC to comment on the recommendations of OCA.

WHEREAS, the CFCJC, during its Technical Working Group Validation Writeshop on February 26, 2025, reviewed the aforesaid matter. Consequently, under Letter dated March 25, 2025 addressed to the Court, the CFCJC manifested its deference to the wisdom, discretion, and expertise of OCA, noting that the proposed amended territorial jurisdiction of the subject Family Courts provides for a better population distribution, while taking consideration the geographical locations of the affected cities and municipalities.

In the same Letter dated March 25, 2025, the CFCJC further recommended that the archived family cases in Branch 3-Family Court, Dipolog City, comprising of pending (i) civil cases originating from the Municipalities of Mutia, Piñan, and Polanco, that have not reached the pre-trial stage; and (ii) criminal cases also originating from these areas where the accused have not yet been arraigned, as of the date of the effectivity of the amended territorial jurisdiction, be transferred to Branch 4-Family Court, Dapitan City, once revived. The purpose is to equalize, as far as practicable, the caseloads of the concerned Family Courts.

NOW, THEREFORE, acting on the recommendations of the Office of the Court Administrator and the

Committee on Family Courts and Juvenile Concerns, the Court, sitting En Banc, resolved as follows:

- The territorial jurisdiction of Branch 4-Family Court, Dapitan City, Zamboanga del Norte, is AMENDED, transferring thereto the Municipalities of Mutia, Piñan, and Polanco, all in the province of Zamboanga del Norte, thus:

"(i) Branch 4-FC (IX), Dapitan City, Zamboanga del Norte, with seat at Dapitan City — over Dapitan City and the Municipalities of Sibutad, Rizal, La Libertad, Mutia, Piñan, and Polanco, all in the Province of Zamboanga del Norte."

- All incoming cases falling within the exclusive original jurisdiction of Family Courts originating from Dapitan City and the Municipalities of Sibutad, Rizal, La Libertad, Mutia, Piñan, and Polanco, all in the Province of Zamboanga del Norte, shall be FILED before Branch 4-Family Court, Dapitan City, Zamboanga del Norte.

- All family cases comprising of pending civil cases that have not yet reached the pre-trial stage, and criminal cases where the accused have not yet been arraigned, as of the date of the effectivity of this amendment, originating from the Municipalities of Mutia, Piñan, and Polanco, all in the Province of Zamboanga del Norte, shall be TRANSFERRED to Branch 4-Family Court, Dapitan City, Zamboanga del Norte.

- Meanwhile, all family cases comprising of pending civil cases that have already reached the pre-trial stage, and criminal cases where the accused have already been arraigned, as of the date of the effectivity of this amendment, originating from the Municipalities of Mutia, Piñan, and Polanco, all in the Province of Zamboanga del Norte, shall be RETAINED in Branch 3-Family Court, Dipolog City, Zamboanga del Norte.

- Likewise, the archived family cases originating from the Municipalities of Mutia, Piñan, and Polanco, all in the Province of Zamboanga del Norte, shall be RETAINED in Branch 3-Family Court, Dipolog City, Zamboanga del Norte, to be heard and tried thereat once revived.

- All court records shall be AMENDED to conform with this Resolution.

This Resolution shall take effect 15 calendar days after its publication in the Official Gazette or any newspaper of general circulation.

May 20, 2025.

(Sgd.)

ALEXANDER G. GESMUNDO

Chief Justice

(Sgd.)

MARVIC M.V.F. LEONEN

Senior Associate Justice

(Sgd.)

ALFREDO BENJAMIN S. CAGUIOA

Associate Justice

(on official business)

RAMON PAUL L. HERNANDO

Associate Justice

(Sgd.)

AMY C. LAZARO-JAVIER

Associate Justice

(on official business)

HENRI JEAN PAUL B. INTING

Associate Justice

(Sgd.)

RODIL V. ZALAMEDA

Associate Justice

(Sgd.)

MARIO V. LOPEZ

Associate Justice

(on official leave)

SAMUEL H. GAERLAN

Associate Justice

(on official leave)

RICARDO R. ROSARIO

Associate Justice

(on official business)

JHOSEP Y. LOPEZ

Associate Justice

(Sgd.)

JAPAR B. DIMAAMPAO

Associate Justice

(on official leave)

JOSE MIDAS P. MARQUEZ

Associate Justice

(Sgd.)

ANTONIO T. KHO, JR.

Associate Justice

(on leave)

MARIA FILOMENA D. SINGH

Associate Justice

[1] Republic Act No. 8369, sec. 2.

[2] Republic Act No. 8369, sec. 3.

[3] Re: Definition of the Territorial Jurisdictions of Family Courts for Regions IX and XI, A.M. No. 20-12-170-RTC, January 26, 2021.

[4] Rollo, pp. 25-29.

[5] Id. at 26.

[6] Id. at 20-22.

[7] Rollo, p. 22.

[8] Creating the Committee on Family Courts and Juvenile Concerns, Supreme Court Memorandum Order No. 20-2014 dated August 13, 2014.

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